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No one should be alone at Christmas.
That's why dinner is served this Sunday.
Page 3

Highway 406 cat finds a home

Kitten tossed from car on the road to recovery.
Page 6

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Memorial tells of a tragic Christmas time tale



ALLAN BERNIER/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Christmas decorations are left as a memorial to the four victims of a fire at 53 Nickel St. in Port Colborne. Related stories can be found on pages 2 and 4.

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LOCAL NEWS

'They might look tough, but this rocked them'

ALLAN BENNER
and MICHELLE ALLENBERG
Postmedia Network

Port Colborne Fire Chief Tom Cartwright struggled to hold back tears as he stood in front of the fire-ravaged house on Nickel Street last Thursday morning.

"It's a struggle for me, it really is for me because I really am intertwined in the community. I'm not from the community, but I've been here for 15 years, I've put my life and soul into it and it is a shock," Cartwright said.

Cartwright, who had attempted CPR on the 83-year-old great-grandmother who died on scene last Wednesday, struggled to finish talking about the tragic fire that claimed four lives, and the impact it has had on the community. "During my career I've only seen four people die and unfortunately we lost four people," said Cartwright, who has worked as a firefighters for 44 years. "It's a shock, you feel this sense of failure."

"We like to think we can prevent these types of things from happening."

Firefighters are "a special breed," said Rev. Brian Lofthouse. "They're wired that way."

"They have this innate desire to rescue people, to do their best to protect their community. I'll tell you, my level of respect and appreciation for the men and women

— In Port Colborne, especially — has just gone way up."

Lofthouse, who has worked as Port Colborne Fire and Emergency Services chaplain for the past 11 years, was called out to 53 Nickel St. at about 6 a.m. last Wednesday to offer his support to firefighters.

But even after dealing with the tragedy, Lofthouse said firefighters

continued to respond to numerous calls for help as a snow squall hit the city that afternoon.

He said watching them in action knowing what they had just been through, left him amazed.

"I don't know how they do it, but they just keep on plugging away."

But as tough and professional as firefighters often seem, Lofthouse said the loss of life that occurred that night "was devastating" to all the firefighters who responded, whether it was the fire department's veteran chief or the newest recruit.

"Some of these young men and women in the firefighters, they're parents. They think of their two-year-old, or 15-year-old. They think of what could have been. It devastated them. This situation rocked not just



Port Colborne Fire and Emergency Services chaplain Rev. Brian Lofthouse, at right, discusses coping with post-traumatic stress disorder with firefighters Scott Lawson and Joe Blodreau in this file photo.

POSTMEDIA FILE PHOTO

the community but the firefighters in this community. They might look tough, but this rocked them," Lofthouse said.

He said firefighters are hardwired to want to rescue people.

"They did everything professionally that they could possibly do and they did it

the right way, but it didn't work out. That is devastating to people who have to rescue people."

As a member of the local critical incident stress management team, Lofthouse is trained to help emergency personnel cope with the abnormal situations they face. He said he tries to "walk along

side them, to encourage them, to debrief with them, and help them through the moments."

On Wednesday evening Lofthouse met with a team of 20 firefighters who were among the first on the scene of that tragic fire, "and I will be meeting with individuals and groups even more, just to let them air out what they need

to, because they have to walk through that themselves."

Cartwright said he has told the firefighters that help is there for them, that they need to do is let him know.

Emotional assistance is also available from the city.

ABenner@postmedia.com
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LOCAL NEWS

No one needs to be alone on Christmas

ALLAN BENNER
Tribune Staff

It has become a Christmas tradition for Jack O'Neil and his family.

While his family gathers at his daughter's home on Christmas Day, O'Neil always arrives late.

Before he can enjoy his Christmas dinner with his family, O'Neil first makes certain that hundreds of other people enjoy the holiday, too.

And it's a tradition that has been taking place every year for two decades in Port Colborne.

In 1997, O'Neil teamed up with his friend Larry Olm to ensure that at least one would spend Christmas alone and hungry.

"We're in our 20th year," O'Neil said.

In the years since, the annual Community Christmas Dinner has grown into an event that includes hundreds of people, enjoying a great meal and some great company.

He said Olm first came up with the idea for the event, concerned that too many people were spending Christmas alone.

"We talked to about five other people and they all jumped on board the first year," O'Neil said.

About 85 people participated in that inaugural Community Christmas Dinner, held at Royal Canadian Legion Branch 56 on Clarence



FRANKI REZMAN/POSTMEDIA FILE PHOTO

Landy O'Donnell, right, serves Christmas dinner at Port Colborne High School in this file photo.

Street.

But the event quickly outgrew the venue, and after a few years it was moved into Port Colborne High School's cafeteria, where it has been taking place ever since.

"It's perfect," O'Neil said of

the venue where more than 200 people gathered last year.

Organizers are expecting just as many people to attend this Sunday's feast with all the trimmings, too.

"It's family," he said.

To feed that many hungry

people, 13 turkeys are purchased from a poultry farm in Dunnville.

"They're delicious," he said.

O'Neil said volunteers also deliver meals to people who cannot attend.

"Last year, I think we delivered 46 meals," he said.

In some cases, he said, residents of seniors apartments each order Christmas dinners, and enjoy the meal together.

"The organizers also deliver

meals to paramedics and police officers who spend Christmas Day on duty.

"We send them a nice hot meal," he said.

O'Neil laughed when asked if it is difficult to find people willing to volunteer on Christmas Day.

"It's no challenge whatsoever," he said.

He said the phones of event organizers are ringing off the hook with people eager to volunteer.

"They call me and say, 'We'd love to help.'"

Local firefighters volunteer, too, arriving in a fire truck and helping out as long as they can, although they are also ready to leave at a moment's notice just in case they are called away to an emergency.

"They do what they can, but if the alarm goes then they're off," he said.

Although it takes about 20 people to run the event, O'Neil said there are often more people willing to volunteer than can be accommodated.

"It just gets to the point that we have to cut people off, because we have too many," he said.

Christmas dinner starts at 1 p.m., and continues until everyone has eaten their fill.

The dinner isn't a charitable event. It's for anyone who wants to participate.

"I don't give a damn if they have a million dollars. If they're alone, come in and have dinner."



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Stop fiddling in the flames, NPCA



GRANT
LAFICHE

There's an old story about the Roman emperor Nero that came to mind the other day while I was reading recent news stories about the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority.

While the great fire of 64 CE was ravaging Rome, Nero—who history has not remembered with much fondness—reportedly reacted by playing his violin while his city burned. Hence why the expression, “fiddling while Rome burns” is shorthand for irresponsible action in the face of a crisis.

The story is probably more apocryphal than factual. Nevertheless, the expression remains a useful one that applies to the NPCA and its refusal to address the crisis of public confidence it faces.

Several municipal councils have called for an audit of the authority's operations amid accusations of mismanagement at the NPCA.

The authority came under scrutiny after local activist Ed Smith issued a report critical of the agency, alleging it uses questionable practices and is rife with conflict of interest problems.

In response, the NPCA threatened legal action against Smith for distributing his report, and demanded an apology. It has also asked Smith to concede to a written “undertaking” confirming he

will not distribute the report and that he will not make any defamatory statements about the authority in the future.

Smith refused to back down. There have been anti-NPCA protests. Municipal councils from St. Catharines, Wellfleet, Hamilton, Niagara-on-the-Lake and Port Colborne, along with Welland MPP Cindy Foster, have called for an audit.

Some, like Wellfleet, asked the NPCA to hire a consultant to do the deed. Others are requesting Queen's Park step in.

So far, the NPCA is having none of it, with its board chairman and St. Catharines regional Council Bruce Timms saying everything is on the up and up.

That assurance has done little to improve the situation.

So perhaps I can offer some

plain advice for the folks at the NPCA:

Just do the audit.

Instead of resisting, the NPCA should embrace the idea.

If everything is as copacetic as Timms claims, a rigorous audit will clear away the fog surrounding the NPCA.

A clean audit will go a long way to rebuilding the public's trust.

On the other hand, if an audit shows things were done improperly, either as a result of bad policy or the actions of the NPCA leadership, then both the organization and the public will know what went wrong, why it went wrong and how to fix it.

Once any problems are meaningfully addressed, public confidence in the NPCA can be restored.

In either case, the outcome is good for the authority and good for Niagara.

Conversely, if the NPCA's stubbornness continues it will sink the integrity of the organization, and the regional councillors who govern it.

There is a caveat the NPCA needs to keep in mind should it decide to do the sensible thing—an audit cannot be a mere public relations exercise.

If the audit is done under the shadow of conflict of interest, or conducted by someone who lacks the requisite expertise, the situation will only become worse.

The NPCA should keep in mind the 2013 failure of the Niagara Region Police Services board to conduct a meaningful public survey as part of its mandated three year business plan.

The survey's methodological problems were exposed by board member Vaughn Stewart. He took the survey 22 times from the same computer by changing its IP address. (Regular readers may recall that I took the survey several times myself.)

The debacle cost \$25,000 of public money.

If the NPCA goes down that kind of road, the damage to its credibility will be high irreparable. For an audit to be taken seriously, the auditor must be an acknowledged expert who is not connected to the NPCA or the regional government in any fashion whatsoever.

Only a well trained, independent auditor can provide the information and transparency the public demands and the NPCA leadership should want.

Port Colborne has company in coping with loss



ALLAN
BENNER

Neighbourhood homes throughout Port Colborne are decked out in twinkling lights and garland.

Several more brightly coloured Christmas decorations and stuffed animals adorn a utility pole at the intersection of Nickel and Mitchell streets, in memory of the tragic loss of life that happened at a nearby home.

While Christmas is a time for celebration for many, there isn't much mood for holiday cheer in Port Colborne.

Port Colborne is a community in mourning after the tragedy that struck early Wednesday, when four people lost their lives, including two children who were taken far too soon.

Sadly, local residents aren't

alone in coping with devastating loss.

On the same day as Port Colborne firefighters worked desperately to save the lives of a young family, the same horrific tragedy was happening in another smaller community of about 2,000 people near London, Ont.

A 43-year-old father and his four little boys, including a three-month-old baby, died in a house fire on Oneida Nation of the Thames native settlement.

Like the tragic fire in Port Colborne, firefighters in Oneida arrived at a home to find it engulfed in flames, making it impossible to save the lives of the people inside.

The people of that community are now facing the same sense of loss and grief that has been expressed locally.

"Devastated, heartbroken, in pain, looking for solace, looking for answers—that's how they are right now," Oneida's fire Chief Randall Phillips was quoted saying in a *London Free Press* story. "We're doing our



POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Weather and a lack of structural integrity of the burned out house are slowed efforts to recover the bodies of fire victims believed to be inside the home at 53 Nickel St. after an early morning blaze in Port Colborne last week.

best as a community to try to ease that, but there's nothing we can do to ease that, just offer comfort and support."

Locally, Port Colborne fire Chief Tom Cartwright shared

very similar sentiments.

Also along with the pain, there is relief in both communities.

The reserve has turned its attention to concerns about sub-

standard housing, inadequate federal government support, not enough federal support for new homes and enhanced fire services.

Local communities have recently helped address the lack of fire services in one native settlement.

Almost a year ago the Rotary Club of Welland teamed up with the Town of Pelham to donate the town's decommissioned pumper truck to Bearskin Lake First Nations, a community about 2,000 km away near Sioux Lookout in northwestern Ontario. Before that truck arrived, volunteer firefighters in that community had only a small pickup truck equipped with a water pump to keep the community safe.

But a question remains unanswered after Port Colborne's fire, too. Although Port Colborne's firefighters and emergency personnel were impeccable in their response, the question remains—how could this happen?

That question will ultimately be answered as the Ontario Fire

Marsh's investigation continues. But for now, we need to do our best to ensure it doesn't happen again.

While it has yet to be determined if the home in Port Colborne had working smoke alarms, the devices remain the best defence we have.

Make sure they're working. I'm one who needs to heed that advice, too.

Fire alarms can be damned annoying when they blast their alarm because they object to my questionable cooking.

And I've been known to yank batteries out of them in frustration when that happens.

That's probably OK, I imagine, as long as you make sure you put the batteries back in when the smoke clears.

Luckily, I have a wife and three kids to remind me to do so once in awhile.

But after these recent tragedies, both here and in Oneida, we shouldn't need any more reminding.

DWI charges up this year

DON FRASER
Postmedia Network

With regional RIDE programs gearing up for the holiday season, Niagara Regional Police say they've laid more drunk driving charges this year than in 2015.

Last year, police laid 492 charges against motorists, with 13 drug tests conducted by officers.

This year, with two weeks left in 2016, the number is up to 525 charges and 28 drug tests.

Meanwhile, Statistics Canada recently released police-reported impaired driving incidents in 2015 for major urban census areas.

While St. Catharines/Niagara — at 126 per 100,000 — ranks well below the Canadian rate of 201, it's the third-highest in Ontario of major urban areas, topped only by Barrie and Peterborough.

So while there aren't so many impaired driving incidents in Niagara, in a new study the U.S. Centers for Disease Control reports Canada ranks No. 1 among 19 wealthy countries for highest percentage of road deaths linked to alcohol impairment.

Overall in Canada, the



MIKE DUBATISTA/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Niagara Regional Police Const. Shawn Donovan is shown at a RIDE spot check on Highway 420 and Montrose Rd. in Niagara Falls in this file photo. Police carry out RIDE spot checks throughout the year, and bring in extra resources for the annual holiday RIDE program that started in late November.

impaired driving rate steadily decreased from 1986, when comparable data was first released, through the early 2000s.

It remained relatively stable until 2011, and has since declined.

Statistics Canada says the impaired driving rate in Canada in 2015 was 65 per cent lower than the rate in 1986. However, the number of drug-impaired driving incidents has been rising since 2009, following legislative changes.

"(the charges) are a little bit higher this year in the region than last," said NRP Sgt. Josh Klop, who also reviewed statistics from 2009 to present,

with 2009 particularly high when 677 charges were laid.

"From 2009 to 2012, statistics went down, year after year, for four years," he said.

After an uptick in 2013, it dropped the following year, then edged up a bit in 2015 and 2016.

"It's tough to give a specific reason why these numbers go up and down each year," Klop said.

"And it's tough to say why the numbers were ... higher eight years ago (and whether) it's the changing nature of our traffic enforcement."

"As far as I know, when it comes to the RIDE program we've basically been running the same amount of RIDEs

per year, based on the funding we get," he said.

That generally translates to 14 to 17 RIDEs each year across Niagara, he said. Officers are also better trained about drug tests and when to use them in traffic enforcement.

Klop said traffic stops tend to be spread out through the year, with about one per month in the summer. He said RIDE stops ramp-up to about one a week during the holiday season.

At least one of the RIDEs over Christmas generally also involves a collaboration with the Ontario Provincial Police.

Klop said RIDE arrest numbers so far are also roughly the same this year as last.

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— with files from Postmedia Network

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LOCAL NEWS

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Niagara Region

Highway 406 cat gets a new family



JULIE JOCSAK/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Ellie, the cat that was thrown out of a moving car on Highway 406, has found a new family with Craig and Karen Sparks of St. Catharines.

MARYANNE FIRTH
Postmedia Network

The cat that was rescued after being thrown from a moving vehicle on Highway 406 has found a loving home.

Ellie — named after Steven Ellis, the passerby who came to her aid — nuzzled her new owners Thursday while sitting in her soon-to-be-empty kennel at Lincoln County Humane Society.

It was love at first sight for Craig and Karen Sparks, who knew they wanted to take home the one-year-old feline when they first heard the news of her ordeal.

On Nov. 22, the cat was thrown from a moving vehicle on the south-bound lanes of the highway between Beaverdams Road and Highway 20 in Thorold.

She was rescued by Ellis and, under the care of the LCHS, underwent surgery for the injuries she sustained to her jaw and paws.

A hot pink button, which has since been removed, was added to her chin to aid with healing. Ellie is still recovering and will have to take it easy during the first few days in her new St. Catharines home, where she will join feline housemates Chico and Xena.

"As soon as we saw her in the paper, I said 'we have to get her,'" Craig recalled.

For Karen, news of the incident was "devastating," but it stressed the need for Ellie to find a loving home.

The pair purchased Ellie a bed for her kennel while she recovered at the

shelter. They also contributed money toward her \$1,000 vet bill, which has been fully covered by community donations.

A week ago the couple learned they would be the lucky adopters.

The Sparks were among four applicants for the young cat's adoption and were chosen through a random draw.

"We want everyone to know we're going to fatten her up and make her healthy," Karen quipped.

"The only thing she'll have to worry about is which lap to lay on," added Craig.

He planned to take Friday off from work to keep an eye on Ellie, who is still wearing a kitty cone following her procedures.

Karen commended the staff at Huntington Animal Hospital, where the surgery was performed, for helping to get Ellie back on her feet.

The pair also plan to keep her name "out of respect for the person who stopped," she said.

LCHS executive director Kevin Strooband called it exciting to see Ellie go home after what she experienced.

"Although no leads have panned out, it's nice to see that she will be in a good place from now on."

The vehicle involved in the incident is described as a grey van or crossover. The licence plate number is not known.

Anyone with information can contact the shelter at 905-682-0767 or the Niagara detachment of the OPP.

mirth@postmedia.com

Confrontation led to charges

TONY RICCIUTO
Postmedia Network

A Brock university student accused of punching a former roommate in the jaw while they were inside Isaac's Pub, will return to court in March for continuation of her trial on assault charges.

Brett McCandless appeared Friday in an Ontario Court of Justice in St. Catharines and pleaded not guilty to charges of assault and assault causing bodily harm. Two incidents took place within a short time of each other on the night of Feb. 26 and the early hours of Feb. 27.

Maria De La Pava, 22, who was a fourth-year student at the time and has since graduated, testified she was getting ready to leave the pub with some friends when McCandless rushed toward her and shoved her backward. A friend held her from falling back.

Security was called, and McCandless was told to wait by the door, but soon there was a second incident. De La Pava said another female who was behind her poured a drink over her head, and as she turned around McCandless punched her in the jaw.

De La Pava said she didn't recall very much what happened after that, but said she was kept behind a coat rack while staff and emergency medical services personnel provided

treatment.

She was taken to hospital by ambulance and released later that day.

Under questioning by assistant Crown attorney Mark Dean, De La Pava said she missed weeks of school following the incident, had to undergo medical treatment for injuries to her jaw and nearly failed to graduate. She was weak, had difficulty standing due to migraine headaches and was nauseous.

Celine Campagna, another Brock student who had gone to the pub with De La Pava, said she did not know McCandless prior to the incident, but had seen her picture.

"Brett came and attacked Maria, shoving and pushing, and I tried to stand in between them," she said. "It was very unexpected."

When the second incident occurred, Campagna said she was also punched in the face by another female, named Chanel.

While being questioned by defence lawyer Andrew Burton, Campagna said she saw Chanel pour the drink over De La Pava's head before she herself was punched in the face.

The following day, both De La Pava and Campagna met with police and provided statements.

The trial continues March 16 in front of Judge Ann Watson.

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Bears make sick kids smile



BOB TYNCEKSYN/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Members of the Niagara IceDogs hockey team are joined by Niagara Regional Police to handout some of the stuffed toys that were tossed onto the ice during the last home game. Johnny Cornelli, whose goal sent stuffed animals pouring onto the ice, offers a choice to five-year-old Yazen Eljaili.

MARYANNE FIRTH
Postmedia Network

His face lit up as the giant teddy bear was handed his way.

"It's bigger than me!" squealed five-year-old Yazen Eljaili as he sat in his bed at St. Catharines hospital. He lovingly gave his new plush friend a name fitting for the season: "Frosty."

The young St. Catharines boy was one of several children who received a surprise visit from the Niagara IceDogs and Niagara Regional Police Chief Jeff McGuire Tuesday.

The crew of visitors did not come empty-handed.

Bags filled with stuffed animals, collected during the annual Teddy Bear Toss at last Thursday's game against the Sault Ste. Marie Greyhounds, were brought from room to room to brighten the day of the hospital's youngest patients.

Dante Palumbo laughed when asked what it was like having the IceDogs crowd into his room.

"Awkward!" the 11-year-old quipped, adding he's used to watching the players from "way up in the stands."

Mother Tammy Palumbo said her son's new bear is a reminder of community kindness that will return home with the St. Catharines family once Dante is discharged.

"I think it's wonderful they come through the hospital," she said. "It's so nice for the families. It came as a nice surprise."

IceDogs forward Johnny Cornelli, who scored Thursday's goal that sent stuffed animals pouring onto the ice, was proud to be supporting such a worthy cause.

He was excited to be making the rounds through the children's beath

unit alongside his teammates.

"I've done this in the past and each year it has been really special."

The teddy bear giveaway also impacts Niagara families beyond the doors of the hospital.

About 1,000 stuffed animals were collected at Thursday's hockey game and donated to Victim Services Niagara.

The organization, which provides 24-7 crisis intervention, hands the bears out on calls to help comfort victims of crime and tragedy, often responding to sudden deaths, suicides and domestic violence incidents.

Executive director Angela Arsenio estimated VSN gives away 1,000 stuffed animals annually, in addition to bears distributed at St. Catharines hospital and shared with Salvation Army, Community Care, Gillian's Place and Women's Place of South Niagara.

"Plenty of adults in times of crisis are happy to accept a bear," she said, adding it creates a sense of comfort for people of all ages during a difficult time.

Crisis responders arrive on scene to provide support that can come in the form of even the smallest gestures, such as making a pot of coffee or holding someone's hand, Arsenio said.

"(They) help with arranging funerals, hand out teddy bears and grief kits for children and adults."

"It's a tool we use," she said of the bears, which are often used to help break news of a death in the family to children.

"Whatever we can do to put a smile on their face on a very dark day."

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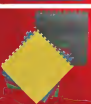
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Monument a tribute to First Nations bonds

DON FRASER
Postmedia Network

Its form embraces the contribution of First Nations people to Canada — and continuing reconciliation.

The designer of the First Nations Stone Hearth Monument is renowned architect Douglas Cardinal, who comes from that heritage.

After years of planning, a concrete pour kicked off work on the prominent outdoor piece at DeCew House Heritage Park in Thorold.

Watching it unfold was Mohawk Tim Johnson, senior adviser to project co-ordinator Friends of Laura Secord.

"This is extremely important," said Johnson, formerly a senior executive in the Cardinal-designed National Museum of the American Indian at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.

"It's filling in the missing pages of history," said Johnson, who is of Mohawk background.



CONCEPT ILLUSTRATION

This illustration shows what Douglas Cardinal's monument to the First Nations will look like when complete at DeCew House Heritage Park in Thorold.

"And that the Six Nations and other Native allies were instrumental in the founding of this country as Allies to Britain."

"We don't read much about that in the textbooks."

The project also gets a boost from a federal government grant announced recently to the Friends, in a Canada 150 Fund grant of \$132,500.

Caroline McCormick, president of the Friends group, said the monument will cost about \$500,000, when folding in substantial in-kind work that includes Rankin Construction and stone from Queenston Quarry in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

"We knew we wanted to make it special, which is why

it's a Canada 150 project," said McCormick, who attended the Wednesday construction launch. "It's been in the planning stages for several years."

McCormick described an extensive process of approvals, permits and proposals, that allowed the project to proceed.

"Just in the past six months, a lot of those things have come together," she said. "It's going to be fantastic, and such a wonderful piece for people to reflect on the importance of the First Nations' contributions to (Canada) ... and help to highlight their efforts."

Cardinal, a Canadian of Sikika (Blackfoot) heritage, is known for his classic curved and organic-looking works that include the showpiece Canadian Museum of History in Gatineau, Que.

His Thorold monument

will feature a circular design acknowledging a spirit of inclusion in native cultures, with curved walls symbols of longhouses. There are also representations of wampum belts denoting peace and reconciliation.

A central hearth and translucent sphere symbolizes the sun, in a space that will also feature seating.

When assembled — likely by June — it will be in the eastern part of the DeCew Road park.

"I would call it an architectural sculpture based on Cardinal's esthetic," said Johnson, who recruited Cardinal to the project. "We were blown away by it."

"Without question, Douglas is one of the most prominent architects in the world, as his esthetic is so unique."

The DeCew House was the final destination of Canadian

heretic Laura Secord in her famous Niagara foot-trek to warn the British and its allies about an impending attack in the War of 1812.

The Battle of Beaverdams which followed, was fought extensively by First Nations forces and proved victorious and pivotal to the defence of the Canadian territory.

There's also a First Nations connection to Secord's journey in their escorting of her through the final leg to the British headquarters at the house.

"It's a dedication to the First Nations for what they did for us during the War of 1812," said Thorold Mayor Ted Lacina, who also came to the pouring. "Without what they did, we probably wouldn't be Canada today."

"I can hardly wait for it to be done."

HEARTBREAKING LOSS FOR THE NIAGARA WHALERS AFTER ADDING NEW OHL TALENT

The Niagara Whalers Jr. A hockey club, playing out of the Vale Centre in Port Colborne, Ontario suffered only their second loss of the season, after re-acquiring St. Catharines native, veteran OHL Niagara Ice Dogs defenceman Broderick Kelly, and Wrentham Rock forward Thomas Thomas (36 points in 36 games last season). Assistant coach, Dave Brennan commented, "This is exactly what happened last time. We picked up some great top-end talent, then lost the very next game. I guess it takes time for new players to gel with the team, and get on the same page with the systems our head coach, Terry Masterson, runs. But we're not concerned yet. I'm sure after they get some practices with the team, and everyone gets comfortable in their new roles, we'll be an even better team because of it." But this loss seemed to stomp the Whalers more than any other. The Kingsville Kings were the team that eliminated the Whalers from the playoffs last season, on their way to capture the south division title, and went on to the finals only to lose in a final game 7 to the Tottenham Steam. Team captain, Steve Quinn, remarked, "It was a tough loss. Kingsville is in 2nd right behind us. They are a team we can't take a single stride without purpose, or they'll score. Look, we outshot them by 20 shots, we led the first half of the game by 2 goals, but they didn't back down, or get intimidated. They kept grinding. Some of the last time we played them at home. We were outshooting them 20-3 after the 1st. Outscoring them 4-0, but they kept grinding to pull even and force overtime, which we ended up winning. But I guess the lesson we should take from this, is not to take our foot off the pedal. We came out hard every game. We came out executing our systems well. But maybe when we win so many games, and we get ahead on the clock, the guys might not play with the same intensity we do when the game is tied, or we're only up a goal. But we have great character as this team. Great coaching. These guys work so hard, do so much in the community. We will regroup, and be a better, more intense, harder working team because of it."

The Whalers will play on the road against Oshawa on Monday. It will be their last game before taking a Christmas break. Next Whaler home game will be at the Vale Centre and Wellness Centre on Friday, January 20th, where they will host the St. George Ravens. The only other team in the league to defeat the Whalers. Playoffs are right around the corner too, beginning February 15th. So, every game counts in importance after the Christmas break, as teams all grow for home ice advantage, better seeding, and some just to make the playoffs. Looks like hard claw to come.

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Withdrawals put cash in charity pockets

JULIE JOCSAK
Postmedia Network

Withdrawing from this ATM also means you're making a deposit toward a good cause.

For each transaction made at the drive-thru ATM on Schmon Parkway in Thorold, PenFinancial Credit Union will donate 50 cents to charity.

Community Care of St. Catharines and Thorold was the first charity chosen to benefit from this new initiative by PenFinancial.

"Tis the season to give — and every other season, too, according to the credit union.

"This machine will be our community ATM indefinitely," said Josh Juhke, marketing and communications specialist for PenFinancial. "Each month we will have a different charity to give the money to."

"It's based on usage and it's a sustainable way that we are supporting the community," Juhke estimates 1,500 transactions in the first month of operation but is hoping that number will increase when people realize



JULIE JOCSAK/STANDARD STAFF

Community Care of St. Catharines and Thorold CEO Betty-Lou Souter, left, and communications and special event co-ordinator Shannon Munro with PenFinancial Credit Union CEO Ken Janzen pull up to a new community ATM on Schmon Parkway in Thorold that will divert 50 cents of each transaction charge to charity.

that 50 cents of each transaction charge will be donated to

a local charity.

The new venture was

launched with a toy drive for Community Care last Friday.

"I think it's awesome to be chosen as the first (benefi-

ciary). I mean how good is that?" said Betty-Lou Souter, chief executive officer of Community Care.

"I think they recognize the need at this time of year for organizations like Community Care. We are touching a lot of people in a lot of different ways, not only at Christmas but throughout the year, and to be recognised and valued for what we do is special."

Ken Janzen, CEO of the PenFinancial Credit Union, said the ATM is a symbol.

"An ATM, which a lot of financial institutions treat as a day to day transaction facility, it represents supporting the community to us," he said.

"These are small things but they add up to great supports in the community and to a lot of people it can make a big difference. More and more people are socially conscious and want to help their community and this is a way that you can do it."

Juhke said non-profits wanting to benefit from the initiative can apply by e-mailing emailus@penfinancial.com.

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Fort Erie, fire chief part ways

Postmedia Network

Major changes are coming to the leadership at Fort Erie Fire Department.

The Town of Fort Erie has announced Larry Coplen is no longer its fire chief.

In a written release issued last week, the town said Coplen's departure was effective immediately.

The town has not announced why the town and Coplen parted ways.

Mayor Wayne Redekop and town chief administrative officer Tom Kuchyt could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

The news comes just weeks after deputy chief Keith German resigned from his post effective in the spring.

The town said the process to recruit Coplen's replacement has begun. German will serve as interim fire chief for now.

"Through Larry's efforts, the organization has accomplished initiatives that will support the future sustainability of fire and emergency services," said Kuchyt in the release. "We wish him well in his future endeavours."

Coplen became Fort Erie's fire chief and community emergency management co-ordinator



Larry Coplen

for in August 2009.

He began his career as a volunteer firefighter and worked his way up through the ranks to become fire chief for the City of Thorold in 2004.

Since coming to the town,

Coplen has taken on key roles in regional and cross-border emergency management issues, expanded the public education program and oversaw the construction of the Central Avenue fire station.

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- Serious injury
- Complications of pregnancy
- Mental health issues

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- Minor mental health issues
- Minor asthma attacks or allergic reactions

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For information on the flu: www.niagararegion.ca/health

For more information on healthcare options visit www.hnhbhealthline.ca

Pelham man dies in collision

ALLAN BENNER
Postmedia Network

An 80-year-old Fonthill man has died after a single motor vehicle collision in Pelham last Thursday morning. Niagara Regional Police say the man was stopped at the red light on Rice Road, at the intersection of Regional Road 20, when he suffered from a "medical event and lost control of the vehicle."

The 2000 Cadillac he was driving crossed the intersection, travelled through a parking lot and across Hurricane Road before colliding with a tree in the front yard of a home at about 9:15 a.m. The man was pronounced dead while his 87-year-old female passenger was uninjured.

Police closed the area to traffic for several hours following the crash, to allow the

collision reconstruction unit to investigate.

Roads were closed as far south as the intersection of Port Robinson and Rice roads, more than 4 km away, and police asked motorists to avoid the area between Merriville Highway to the east, and Pelham Street to the west.

Sgt. Ron Tufford said the extent of the road closure was due to the "complicated inter-

section" where the collision occurred, because of heavy traffic where Hurricane Road intersects Rice Road in the area.

The identity of the man has

not been released by police.

The collision remains under investigation by the collision reconstruction unit.

Any witnesses with information regarding this col-

lision are asked to contact investigators at 905-688-4111, ext. 5500.

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Nickel Area Storm Outfall Class Environmental Assessment Notice of Study Completion



The City of Port Colborne is undertaking the detailed design for the replacement of the Nickel Area storm sewer system, as well as proposing the reconstruction of two storm sewer outfalls that currently outlet to the Welland Canal.

This project is being planned under **Schedule B of the Municipal Class Environmental Assessment** (October 2000, as amended in 2007, 2011 & 2015), which is approved under the *Ontario Environmental Assessment Act*. Subject to comments received as a result of this Notice, and the receipt of necessary approvals, the City of Port Colborne intends to proceed with the design and construction of this project.

The project file report is available at http://portcolborne.ca/page/Current_Studies and at the following locations:

Clerk's Office
City of Port Colborne
66 Charlotte Street
Port Colborne, Ontario L3K 3C8
Hours: 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Port Colborne Library
310 King Street
Port Colborne, Ontario L3K 4H1

Hours: Mon, Tues & Thurs 10:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m.
Wed, Fri & Sat 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Interested persons should provide written comment to Chris Lee on the proposal within 30 calendar days from the date of this Notice. If concerns arise regarding this project, which cannot be resolved in discussion with the municipality, a person or party may request that the Minister of Environment and Climate Change order a change in the project status and require a higher level of assessment under an individual Environmental Assessment process (referred to as Part II Order). Reasons must be provided for the request. The Minister must receive requests for Part II Order at the address below by January 27, 2017. If no request is received by January 27, 2017, the project will proceed to design and construction.

The Honourable Glen Murray, Minister of Environment and Climate Change
77 Wellesley Street West, 11th Floor, Ferguson Block
Toronto, ON M7A 2T5

A copy of the request must also be sent to:

Chris Lee
Manager of Projects & Design
Engineering Department
City of Port Colborne
66 Charlotte Street
Port Colborne, ON L3K 3C8
905-835-2900 ext. 223
E-mail: nickelstorm@portcolborne.ca

Sabrina Coletti
Senior Planner
WSP Canada
100 Commerce Valley Drive W.
Thornhill, ON L3T 0A1
905-882-4211 x 6835
E-mail: coletti@wsp.ca

Under the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* and the *Environmental Assessment Act*, unless otherwise stated in the submission, any personal information such as name, address, telephone number and property location included in a submission will become part of the public record files for this matter and may be released, if requested, to any person.

This Notice issued December 22, 2016

Ron Hanson, C.E.T., Director of Engineering & Operations, City of Port Colborne

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Strangers decorate senior's home

MARYANNE FIRTH
Postmedia Network

It was an unexpected glimmer of Christmas magic.

John A. MacDonald looked outside his home only to find a crew of elves had quietly decorated around his property in an effort to brighten his holidays.

The St. Catharines senior, who is in poor health and grieving the loss of his wife, was dealt a blow last week when he discovered his newly-bought Christmas lights had been stolen from his Rockwood Avenue home.

He had purchased the \$120 light projector system to give himself a boost during this difficult time of year.

When news of the theft made headlines in *The Standard* Dec. 9, it caught the attention of 91.7 Giant FM host Kristy Knight, who

was touched by the story and decided she wanted to offer MacDonald a helping hand.

She rallied a crew of friends and colleagues who pitched in to buy new lights and they set off Saturday morning to decorate the Rockwood home.

"I was amazed by the response of my friends on my Facebook who just wanted to do something," Knight said, adding she saw similar support from Welland radio station co-host Jeff Brown and midday announcer Chris-hon.

MacDonald was trying to re-introduce some light into his life after his wife's death and that was taken away, Knight said.

"We've all been through that thing where you try to step up and you get knocked back down. It was time to help him step back up again."

When the elven bunch arrived to MacDonald's

home, the door went unanswered.

They took it as an opportunity to surprise the senior and got to work putting decorations in place.

They filled his trees with snowflakes and bows, put candy canes and light-up snowmen on his lawn and replaced the laser light.

When Knight called MacDonald that afternoon, she learned he had been home all along but was asleep while the decorating was underway.

"He said, 'When I woke up, I thought I'd overslept, it was Christmas morning and that Santa had come,'"

she said.

"He was so appreciative and just a lovely man."

Knight admitted they both shed some tears during the heartfelt phone call, speaking about Christmas, the challenges it can pose and the need for people to be there to support one another.

"We both agreed that it takes a community to raise a community."

"Without people in our community and their help, who are we? We're nothing," she said.

"We need help. This is why we're here. Some of us don't have family, so we

need the community to step up and watch out for each other."

MacDonald has been overwhelmed by the community and its willingness to aid him in his time of need.

In addition to the efforts of the crew of decorators, he's been given two Home Hardware gift cards from strangers totalling \$250 and Home Hardware on Hartzel Road has donated additional laser lights.

"It was really kind of everyone. I appreciate it immensely," he said of the surprise donations that have touched his heart.

"Nothing like that has ever happened to me before."

For MacDonald, the holidays are the saddest time of year. He longs for the days he would spend Christmas with Florence, his wife of 42 years.

She passed away four years ago after a battle with cancer, leaving a void in her husband's life.

"Everyone has a family. I used to. Everyone gets together and now there's nothing," MacDonald said.

"But to have people respond like they have, that's wonderful. I really appreciate that."



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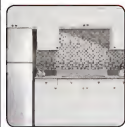
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Rowing club also creating award Be attentive to the needs of the poor

MEMORIAL FROM PAGE 25

Crossley coach John Rusch said the event was held to raise about \$27,000 to purchase a coxed four rowing boat for the school team, to be named in Emily's memory and cherished by her teammates.

South Niagara Rowing Club, too, will keep Emily's memory alive, by creating an award in her honour to be presented annually to the hardest-working athletes in the club.

"It's overwhelming ... to see that so many people care so much about her and care that her legacy will go on," Kerry said, while describing her daughter as "a hard-working dedicated young lady."

Knowing you did your best often meant more to Emily than finishing first. And Emily would be very happy knowing that an award will be presented in her memory that exemplifies the ideals she believed in, she said.

Emily's father wrote down his thoughts about the event and the community support the family has received.

"It is hard to put into



ALLAN BENNER/WELLAND TRIBUNE

Emily Brettell's family struggle with emotion as they hear plans to keep the teenager's memory alive, at a memorial hockey game, on Saturday.

words the heartfelt thanks we would like to express for all the thoughtfulness, sympathy and support we have received from family, friends and the entire community during this difficult time, he wrote.

"Emily's legacy is very much defined by her

strength of character, courage and burning desire to be the best she could be.

"And to all of her coaches and teammates, we are so very grateful for your ongoing friendship and support and, like Emily, never forget that whenever you find yourself doubting how far you can go, just remember how far you have come."

"Remember everything you have faced, all the battles you have won, and all the fears you have overcome and don't let anything stand in your way."

ABenner@postmedia.com
Twitter: @abenner1



As a new year approaches, those in the accounting world are preparing year-end reports. This work is important because it provides an opportunity to see how a business has performed over the past year.

Christians believe that in a similar way, one day we will have to give a "life end report" to God.

On the day of our death we will stand before God and be asked to give an account of our lives. From a spiritual perspective, we could call it our final exam.

The great thing is that Jesus has already given us the exam question so that we can prepare.

In the Gospel of St. Matthew (25:31-46), we find the ultimate measure that will determine our eternal destiny.

Jesus says, "for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me."

"I was in prison and you vis-

ited me ... Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

This passage is incredible for a number of reasons.

First, Jesus is associating himself not with the rich and powerful, but with the poor and vulnerable. Whatever we do for these people, or fail to do, it is as if we are doing it to the Lord himself.

Second, we know what we will be asked on Judgment Day — how did you treat the poor and the vulnerable?

Finally, this passage helps to put many issues we are facing as a society into perspective. Poverty, especially child poverty, clean drinking water and the environment, the refugee crisis, life issues and the treatment of prisoners, are significant issues that should not be ignored.

We cannot afford to be indifferent, because our salvation is at stake; however, in our efforts to address poverty we cannot forget what the poor can teach us.

In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel), Pope Francis reminds us God's heart has a special place for the poor.

"This is why I want a Church which is poor and for the poor. They have so much to teach us. We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be friends, to listen to

them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them." (180).

Pope Francis believes our commitment to the poor should be rooted in attentiveness, rather than activism. This attentiveness is expressed more in theological than sociological terms.

The "preferential option for the poor" is a theological concept rooted in the saving action of Christ. It expresses the fact that Jesus became poor for us in order to enrich us with his poverty.

God shows us how to make the care of the poor and the vulnerable a priority. This is not simply moving goods from those who have to those who have not. That is far too materialistic, and omits the spiritual aspect found in attentiveness and love which is foundational to our understanding of social justice.

This should be a guiding principle for our local communities and churches.

Let us be attentive to the needs of the poor and share our resources with them. Spiritual accounting principles teach us that when we invest in people in this life, the dividends will last an eternity.

Most Reverend Gerard Berge is Bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of St. Catharines and can be contacted at bishop@stcatholic.com

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